

sick duck. Get in here. You have got to get that train *now*."

"Mr. Brown," said Betty in a severe whisper, "mind, don't say a word to him about this business. I can't stand it."

"Certainly not," said Brown, in a matter of fact tone. "There's nothing to be said."

But there was one last word to be said, and that was Betty's.

"Good-bye, Shock," she whispered to him, as he stepped upon his train. "I think—I know—I'm very glad."

Poor Shock could only grasp her hand in mute farewell. It was just dawning upon him that he had some further offering to bring to make his sacrifice complete.

ON THE TRAIL

"**T**HAT'S the trail. Loon Lake lies yonder."

Shock's Convener, who had charge for his Church of this district, stood by the buck-board wheel pointing southwest. He was a man about middle life, rather short but well set up, with a strong, honest face, tanned and bearded, redeemed abundantly from commonness by the eye, deep blue and fearless, that spoke of the genius in the soul. It was a kindly face withal, and with humour lurking about the eyes and mouth. During the day and night spent with him Shock had come to feel that in this man there was anchorage for any who might feel themselves adrift, and somehow the great West, with its long leagues of empty prairie through which he had passed, travelling by the slow progress of construction trains, would now seem a little less empty because of this man. Between the new field toward which this trail led and the home and folk in the far East there would always be this man who would know him, and would sometimes be thinking of him. The thought heartened Shock more than a little.

"That's the trail," repeated the Convener; "follow that; it will lead you to your home."

"Home!" thought Shock with a tug at his heart and a queer little smile on his face.

"Yes, a man's home is where his heart is, and his heart is where his work lies."

Shock glanced quickly at the man's tanned face. Did he suspect, Shock wondered, the homesickness and the longing in his heart?

Last night, as they had sat together in late talk, he had drawn from Shock with cunning skill (those who knew him would recognise the trick) the picture of his new missionary's home, and had interpreted aright the thrill in the voice that told of the old lady left behind. But now, as Shock glanced at his Convener's face, there was nothing to indicate any hidden meaning in his words. The speaker's eyes were far down the trail that wound like a wavering white ribbon over the yellow-green billows of prairie that reached to the horizon before and up to the great mountains on the right.

"Twenty miles will bring you to Spruce Creek stopping-place; twenty miles more and you are at Big River—not so very big either. You will see there a little school and beside it, on the left, a little house—you might call it a shack, but we make the most of things out here. That's Mr. McIntyre's manse, and proud of it they all are, I can tell you. You will stay with him over night—a fine fellow you will find him, a Nova Scotian, very silent; and better than himself is the little brave woman he has for a wife; a really superior woman. I sometimes wonder—but never mind, for people doubtless wonder at our wives: one can never get at the bottom of the mystery of why some women do it. They will see you on your way.

Up to this time he was the last man we had in that direction. Now you are our outpost—a distinction I envy you."

The Convener's blue eye was alight with enthusiasm. The call of the new land was ever ringing in his heart, and the sound of the strife at the front in his ear.

Unconsciously Shock drew in a long breath, the homesickness and heart-longing gave back before the spirit of high courage and enterprise which breathed through the words of the little man beside him, whose fame was in all the Western Church.

"Up these valleys somewhere," continued the Convener, waving his hands towards the southern sky-line, "are the men—the ranchers and cowboys I told you of last night. Some good men, and some of them devils—men good by nature, devils by circumstance, poor fellows. They won't want you, perhaps, but they need you badly. And the Church wants them, and"—after a little pause—"God wants them."

The Convener paused, still looking at the distant flowing hills. Then he turned to Shock and said solemnly, "We look to you to get them."

Shock gasped. "To me! to get them!"

"Yes, that's what we expect. Why! do you remember the old chap I told you about—that old prospector who lives at Loon Lake?—you will come across him, unless he has gone to the mountains. For thirteen years that man has hunted the gulches for mines. There are your mines," waving his hand again, "and you are our prospector. Dig them up.

Good-bye. God bless you. Report to me in six months."

The Convener looked at his fingers after Shock had left, spreading them apart. "Well, what that chap grips he'll hold until he wants to let it go," he said to himself, wrinkling his face into a curious smile.

Now and then as he walked along the trail he turned and looked after the buckboard heading toward the southern horizon, but never once did his missionary look back.

"I think he will do. He made a mess of my service last night, but I suppose he was rattled, and then no one could be more disgusted than he, which is not a bad sign. His heart's all right, and he will work, but he's slow. He's undoubtedly slow. Those fellows will give him a time, I fear," and again the Convener smiled to himself. As he came to the brow of the hill, where the trail dipped into the river bottom in which the little town lay that constituted the nucleus of his parish, he paused and, once more turning, looked after the diminishing buckboard. "He won't look back, eh! All right, my man. I like you better for it. It must have been a hard pull to leave that dear old lady behind. He might bring her out. There are just the two of them. Well, we will see. It's pretty close shaving."

He was thinking of the threatened cut in the already meagre salaries of his missionaries, rendered necessary by the disproportion between the growth of the funds and the expansion of the work.

"It's a shame, too," he said, turning and looking once more after Shock in case there should be a final signal of farewell, which he would be sorry to miss.

"They're evidently everything to each other." But it was an old problem with the Convener, whose solution lay not with him, but with the church that sent him out to do this work.

Meantime Shock's eyes were upon the trail, and his heart was ringing with that last word of his Convener. "We expect you to get them. You are our prospector, dig them up." As he thought of the work that lay before him, and of all he was expected to achieve, his heart sank. These wild, independent men of the West were not at all like the degraded men of the ward, fawning or sullen, who had been his former and only parishioners. A horrible fear had been growing upon him ever since his failure, as he considered it, with the Convener's congregation the night before. It helped him not at all to remember the kindly words of encouragement spoken by the Convener, nor the sympathy that showed in his wife's voice and manner. "They felt sorry for me," he groaned aloud. He set his jaws hard, as men had seen him when going into a scrim on the football field. "I'll do my best whatever," he said aloud, looking before him at the waving horizon; "a man can only fail. But surely I can help some poor chap out yonder." His eyes followed the waving foot-hill line till they rested on the mighty masses of the Rockies. "Ay," he said with a start, dropping into his mother's speech, "there they are, 'the hills from whence

cometh my help.' Surely, I do not think He would send me out here to fail."

There they lay, that mighty wrinkling of Mother Earth's old face, huge, jagged masses of bare grey rock, patched here and there, and finally capped with white where they pierced the blue. Up to their base ran the lumbering foot-hills, and still further up the grey sides, like attacking columns, the dark daring pines swarmed in massed battalions; then, where ravines gave them footing, in regiments, then in outpost pickets, and last of all in lonely rigid sentinels. But far above the loneliest sentinel pine, cold, white, serene, shone the peaks. The Highland blood in Shock's veins stirred to the call of the hills. Glancing around to make sure he was quite alone—he had almost never been where he could be quite sure that he would not be heard—Shock raised his voice in a shout, again, and, expanding his lungs to the full, once again. How small his voice seemed, how puny his strength, how brief his life, in the presence of those silent, mighty, ancient ranges with their hoary faces and snowy heads. Awed by their solemn silence, and by the thought of their ancient, eternal, unchanging endurance, he repeated to himself in a low tone the words of the ancient Psalm:

"Lord, Thou hast been our dwelling-place,
In generations all,
Before Thou ever hadst brought forth
The mountains, great or small!"

How exalting are the mountains and how humbling!
How lonely and how comforting! How awesome and

how kindly! How relentless and how sympathetic! Reflecting every mood of man, they add somewhat to his nobler stature and diminish somewhat his ignobler self. To all true appeal they give back answer, but to the heart regarding iniquity, like God, they make no response. They never obtrude themselves, but they smile upon his joys, and in his sorrow offer silent sympathy, and ever as God's messengers they bid him remember that with all their mass man is mightier than they, that when the slow march of the pines shall have trod down their might's dust, still with the dew of eternal youth fresh upon his brow will he be with God.

Then and there in Shock's heart there sprang up a kindly feeling for the mountains that through all his varying experiences never left him. They were always there, steadfastly watchful by day like the eye of God, and at night while he slept keeping unslumbering guard like Jehovah himself. All day as he drove up the interminable slopes and down again, the mountains kept company with him, as friends might. So much so that he caught himself, more than once after moments of absorption, glancing up at them with hasty penitence. He had forgotten them, but unoffended they had been watching and waiting for him.

A little after noon Shock found the trail turn in toward a long, log, low-roofed building, which seemed to have been erected in sections, with an irregular group of sod-roofed out-houses clustering about.

An old man lounged against the jamb of the open door.

"Good day," said Shock politely.

The old man looked him over for a moment or two and then answered as if making a concession of some importance, "Good day, *good day!* From town? Want to eat?"

A glance through the door, showing the remains of dinner on a table, determined Shock. "No, I guess I'll push on."

"All right," said the old man, his tone suggesting that while it was a matter of supreme indifference to him, to Shock it might be a somewhat serious concern to neglect to eat in his house.

"This is Spruce Creek?" enquired Shock.

"Yes, I believe that's what they call it," said the old man with slow deliberation, adding after a few moments silence "because there ain't no spruces here."

Shock gave the expected laugh with such heartiness that the old man deigned to take some little interest in him.

"Cattle?" he enquired.

"No."

"Sport?"

"Well, a little, perhaps."

"Oh! Pospectin', eh? Well, land's pretty well taken up in this vicinity, I guess."

To this old man there were no other interests in life beyond cattle, sport, and prospecting that could account for the stranger's presence in this region.

"Yes," laughed Shock, "prospecting in a way, too."

The old man was obviously puzzled.

"Well," he ventured, "come inside, anyway. Pretty chilly wind that for April. Come right in!"

Shock stepped in. The old man drew nearer to him.

"Pain-killer or lime-juice?" he enquired in an insinuating voice.

"What?" said Shock.

"Pain-killer or lime-juice," winking and lowering his voice to a confidential tone.

"Well, as I haven't got any pain I guess I'll take a little lime-juice," replied Shock.

The old man gave him another wink, long and slow, went to the corner of the room, pushed back a table, pulled up a board from the floor, and extracted a bottle.

"You's got to be mighty careful," he said. "Them blank police fellers, instead of attending to their business, nose round till a feller can't take no rest at night."

He went to a shelf that stood behind the plank that did for a counter, took down two glasses, and filled them up.

"There," he said with great satisfaction, "you'll find that's no back-yard brew."

Shock slowly lifted the glass and smelt it. "Why, it's whisky!" he said in a surprised tone.

"Ha! ha!" burst out the old man. "You're a dandy; that's what it is at home."

He was delighted with his guest's fine touch of humour. Shock hesitated a moment or two, looking down at the whisky in the glass before him.

"How much?" he said at length.

"Oh, we'll make that fifty cents to you," said the old man carelessly.

Shock put down the money, lifted his glass slowly, carried it to the door and threw the contents outside.

"Hold on there! What the blank, blank do you mean?" The old man was over the counter with a bound.

"It was mine," said Shock quietly.

"Yours," shouted the old man, beside himself with rage; "I aint goin' to stand no such insult as that."

"Insult!"

"What's the matter with that whisky?"

"All right as far as I know, but I wanted lime-juice."

"Lime-juice!" The old man's amazement somewhat subdued his anger. "Lime-juice! Well, I'll be blanked!"

"That's what I asked for," replied Shock good-naturedly.

"Lime-juice!" repeated the old man. "But what in blank, blank did you throw it out for?"

"Why, what else could I do with it?"

"What else? See here, stranger, the hull population of this entire vicinity isn't more than twenty-five persons, but every last one of 'em twenty-five 'ud told you what to do with it. Why didn't you give it to me?"

"Why," said Shock in a surprised tone, "I don't know the ways of your country, but where I come from we don't take any man's leavings."

This was new light upon the subject for the old man.

"Well, now, see here, young man, if ever you're in doubt again about a glass of whisky like that one there, you just remark to yourself that while there may be a few things you might do with it, there's just one you can't. There's only one spot for whisky, and that's inside some fellow that knows something. Heavens and earth! Didn't know what to do with it, eh?"

He peered curiously into Shock's face as if he found him an interesting study.

"No," said Shock seriously, "you see, I couldn't drink it—never did in my life."

The old man drew nearer to him. "Say," touching him with his forefinger on the chest, "if I could only be sure you'd keep fresh I'd put you in a case. They'd come a mighty long way in this country to see you, you bet."

Bill Lee's anger and disgust were giving place to curiosity.

"What are you, anyway?" he enquired.

"Well, my boss told me to-day I was a prospector." Shock's mind reverted, as he spoke, to that last conversation with his Convener.

"Prospector," echoed the old man. "What for, land, coal?"

"No, men."

"What?" The old man looked as if he could not have heard aright.

"Men," said Shock again simply and earnestly.

Bill was hopelessly puzzled. He tried to get at it another way.

"What's your Company?" he enquired. "I mean who are you working for?"

Before answering Shock paused, looking far past Bill down the trail and then said solemnly, "God."

Bill started back from his companion with a gasp of surprise. Was the man mad? Putting the incident of the whisky and this answer of his together, he might well be.

"Yes," said Shock, withdrawing his eyes from the trail and facing Bill squarely. "That's my business. I am after men." He drew from his pocket a small Bible and read, "Follow me and I will make you fishers of men."

When Bill saw the Bible he looked relieved, but rather disgusted.

"Oh, I git you now! You're a preacher, eh?"

"Well," said Shock in a tone almost confidential, "I'll tell you I'm not much of a preacher. I don't think I'm cut out for that, somehow." Here Bill brightened slightly. "I tried last night in town," continued Shock, "and it was pretty bad. I don't know who had the worst of it, the congregation or myself. But it was bad."

"Thinkin' of quittin'?" Bill asked almost eagerly, "Because if you are, I know a good job for a fellow of your build and make."

"No, I can't quit. I have got to go on." Bill's face fell. "And perhaps I can make up in some other ways. I may be able to help some fellows a

bit." The sincerity and humble earnestness of Shock's tone quite softened Bill's heart.

"Well, there's lots of 'em need it," he said in his gruff voice. "There's the blankest lot of fools on these ranches you ever seen."

Shock became alert. He was on the track of business.

"What's wrong with them?" he enquired.

"Wrong? Why, they aint got no sense. They stock up with cattle, horses, and outfit to beat creation, and then let the whole thing go to blazes."

"What's the matter with them?" persisted Shock, "Are they lazy?"

"Lazy! not a hair. But when they get together over a barrel of beer or a keg of whisky they are like a lot of hogs in a swill trough, and they won't quit while they kin stand. That's no way for a man to drink!" continued Bill in deep disgust.

"Why, is not this a Prohibition country?"

"Oh! Prohibition be blanked! When any man kin get a permit for all he wants to use, besides all that the whisky men bring in, what's the good of Prohibition?"

"I see," said Shock. "Poor chaps. It must be pretty slow for them here."

"Slow!" exclaimed Bill. "That aint no reason for a man's bein' a fool. I aint no saint, but I know when to quit."

"Well, you're lucky," said Shock. "Because I have seen lots of men that don't, and they're the fellows that need a little help, don't you think so?"

Bill squirmed a little uneasily.

"You can't keep an eye on all the fools unless you round 'em up in corral," he grunted.

"No. But a man can keep from thinking more of a little tickling in his stomach than he does of the life of his fellowman."

"Well, what I say is," replied Bill, "every fellow's got to look after himself."

"Yes," agreed Shock, "and a little after the other fellows, too. If a man is sick——"

"Oh! now you're speakin'," interrupted Bill eagerly. "Why, certainly."

"Or if he is not very strong."

"Why, of course."

"Now, don't you think," said Shock very earnestly, "that kicking a man along that is already sliding toward a precipice is pretty mean business, but snatching him back and bracing him up is worth a man's while?"

"Well, I guess," said Bill quietly.

"That's the business I'm trying to do," said Shock. "I'd hate to help a man down who is already on the incline. I think I'd feel mean, and if I can help one man back to where it's safe, I think it's worth while, don't you?"

Bill appeared uncomfortable. He could not get angry, Shock's manner was so earnest, frank, respectful, and sincere, and at the same time he was sharp enough to see the bearing of Shock's remarks upon what was at least a part of his business in life.

"Yes," repeated Shock with enthusiasm, "that's

worth while. Now, look here, if you saw a man sliding down one of those rocks there," pointing to the great mountains in the distance, "to sure death, would you let him slide, or would you put your hand out to help him?"

"Well, I believe I'd try," said Bill slowly.

"But if there was good money in it for you," continued Shock, "you would send him along, eh?"

"Say, stranger," cried Bill indignantly, "what do you think I am?"

"Well," said Shock, "there's a lot of men sliding down fast about here, you say. What are you doing about it?" Shock's voice was quiet, solemn, almost stern.

"I say," said Bill, "you'd best put up your horse and feed. Yes, you've got to feed, both of you, and this is the best place you'll find for twenty miles round, so come right on. You're line ain't mine, but you're white. I say, though," continued Bill, unhitching the cayuse, "it's a pity you've taken up that preachin' business. I've not much use for that. Now, with that there build of yours"—Bill was evidently impressed with Shock's form—"you'd be fit for almost anything."

Shock smiled and then grew serious.

"No," he said, "I've got to live only once, and nothing else seemed good enough for a fellow's life."

"What, preachin'?"

"No. Stopping men from sliding over the precipice and helping them back. The fact is," and Shock looked over the cayuse's back into Bill's eyes, "every

man should take a hand at that. There's a lot of satisfaction in it."

"Well, stranger," replied Bill, leading the way to the stable, "I guess you're pretty near right, though it's queer to hear me say it. There aint much in anything, anyway. When your horse is away at the front leadin' the bunch and everybody yellin' for you, you're happy, but when some other fellow's horse makes the runnin' and the crowd gets a-yellin' for him, then you're sick. Pretty soon you git so you don't care."

"'Vanity of vanities, all is vanity,'" quoted Shock. "Solomon says you're right."

"Solomon, eh? Well, by all accounts he hit quite a gait, too. Had them all lookin' dizzy, I reckon. Come on in. I'll have dinner in a shake."

Fried pork and flapjacks, done brown in the gravy, with black molasses poured over all, and black tea strong enough to float a man-of-war, all this with a condiment of twenty miles of foot-hill breezes, makes a dinner such as no king ever enjoyed. Shock's delight in his eating was so obvious that Bill's heart warmed towards him. No finer compliment can be paid a cook than to eat freely and with relish of his cooking. Before the meal was over the men had so far broken through the barriers of reserve as to venture mutual confidences about the past. After Shock had told the uneventful story of his life, in which his mother, of course, was the central figure, Bill sat a few moments in silence, and then began: "Well, I never knew my mother. My father was a devil, so I

guess I came naturally by all the devilment in me, and that's a few. But"—and here Bill paused for some little time—"but I had a sweetheart once, over forty years ago now, down in Kansas, and she was all right, you bet. Why, sir, she was—oh! well, 'taint no use talkin', but I went to church for the year I knowed her more'n all the rest of my life put together, and was shapin' out for a different line of conduct until—" Shock waited in silence. "After she died I didn't seem to care. I went out to California, knocked about, and then to the devil generally." Shock's eyes began to shine.

"I know," he said, "you had no one else to look after—to think of."

"None that I cared a blank for. Beg pardon. So I drifted round, dug for gold a little, ranched a little, just like now, gambled a little, sold whisky a little, nothing very much. Didn't seem to care much, and don't yet."

Shock sat waiting for him to continue, but hardly knew what to say. His heart was overflowing with pity for this lonely old man whose life lay in the past, grey and colourless, except for that single bright spot where love had made its mark. Suddenly he stretched out his hand toward the old man, and said: "What you want is a friend, a real good friend."

The old man took his hand in a quick, fierce grip, his hard, withered face lit up with a soft, warm light.

"Stranger," he said, trying hard to keep his voice steady, "I'd give all I have for one."

"Let me tell you about mine," said Shock quickly.

Half an hour later, as Bill stood looking after Shock and rubbing his fingers, he said in soliloquy: "Well, I guess I'm gittin' old. What in thunder has got into me, anyway? How'd he git me on to that line? Say, what a bunco steerer he'd make! And with that face and them eyes of his! No, 'taint that. It's his blank honest talk. Hang if I know what it is, but he's got it! He's white, I swear! But blank him! he makes a fellow feel like a thief."

Bill went back to his lonely ranch with his lonely, miserable life, unconsciously trying to analyse his new emotions, some of which he would be glad to escape, and some he would be loath to lose. He stood at his door a moment, looking in upon the cheerless jumble of boxes and furniture, and then turning, he gazed across the sunny slopes to where he could see his bunch of cattle feeding, and with a sigh that came from the deepest spot in his heart, he said: "Yes, I guess he's right. It's a friend I need. That's what."

VII

THE OUTPOST

UPON a slight swell of prairie stood the Outpost manse of Big River, the sole and only building in the country representative of the great Church which lay behind it, and which, under able statesmanship, was seeking to hold the new West for things high and good. The Big River people were proud of their manse. The minister was proud of it, and with reason. It stood for courage, faith, and self-denial. To the Convener and Superintendent, in their hours of discouragement, this little building brought cheer and hope. For, while it stood there it kept touch between that new country and what was best and most characteristic in Canadian civilisation, and it was for this that they wrought and prayed. But, though to people and minister, Convener and Superintendent, the little manse meant so much, the bareness, the unloveliness, and, more than all, the utter loneliness of it smote Shock with a sense of depression. At first he could not explain to himself this feeling. It was only after he had consciously recognised the picture which had risen in contrast before his mind as the home of the Fairbanks, that he understood.